

# WHEN WERE THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

A Quiet Sunday Afternoon in Avenue A



## Japanese Women Proving the Mainstay of the Mikado's Power

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and select circle of "new women" of Japan have never made any attempt to reform the national dress of the empire, if there is any such thing. I have yet to see a young Japanese girl dressed in the modes of the Western world. I asked a Japanese lady if there was a corset shop in Japan. She said that she had heard there was one in Kobe and another in Yokohama, but that both were patronized by Europeans and Americans.

But she hastened to assure me that there were no end of hairdressing establishments—coiffures pour les dames. It is quite easy to believe this, because even the women that work in the rice paddies display carefully arranged coifs that always seem to be in order, sleek and well coiled.

I think that the traffic in face powder must be very good in Japan, particularly in the cities, where the faces of most of the young girls and women evidence the use of the powder puff, the eyebrow pencil and, I am informed, the lipstick. But I have yet to see a Japanese damsel reach into the ample pocket sleeve of her kimono and dig up either of those devices of civilization and make use of them in public.

Smoking is considered a matter of individual preference among Japanese women, but is generally confined to the elders. Most of them smoke the long stemmed, brass bowl pipes which hold a little pinch of so-called tobacco. The only young women I have seen smoking even these pipes are the geisha girls called in to entertain the guests at some of the native dinners. Very few of the women smoke cigarettes, but when they feel like it they do it anywhere and at any time. They may drink cocktails—and probably do indulge in sake—but I cannot recall having seen any of them do so. The only women I have seen wearing hats in Japan were foreigners, and the native women did not appear to be particularly interested in even the most fetching.

### Rich, Cultured, Famous

#### Women of the Empire

The Mikado's kingdom boasts of several women who have achieved distinction in business and the arts, though none of these is classed as a "new woman," nor do they take part in political controversies or manifest any interest over unlimited suffrage. The richest woman in Japan is Mme. Suzuki. She is the only female subject of the Mikado to be honored with a decoration, for her help in building up the for-

sign trade of the empire. Mme. Suzuki, who lives at Kobe, is now approaching 70. Twenty-five years ago she inherited a small sugar business and built up one of the most profitable export enterprises in the country. She personally directs her various interests and her fortune is estimated at about 150,000,000 yen, or \$75,000,000.

Another Japanese woman who has achieved great distinction in business is Mme. Nakamura, who is an unusually attractive woman, 35 years old. She inherited a small steel business from her husband and has built it up so that it brings her an income of \$200,000 a year. She recently adopted a son of one of the old Samurai with great ceremony.

Mme. Ume Tsuda, who has become one of the leading educators of Japan, was graduated from Bryn Mawr. She is taking a leading part in urging reforms for women, but is not an advocate of equal suffrage.

Japan boasts of a woman editor who is also a prosperous publisher of various journals. She is Mme. Moto Hani. She was the first woman to be put in charge of a "woman's page" in Japan. Three of the publications that she issues are called "Friend of Women," "Friend of Study" and "Friend of the Child." Although Mme. Hani wears Japanese dress, her two children wear the garb of the West. Her husband is the business manager of her publishing business.

Mme. Makino is a manufacturer of brass at Yokohama and makes \$10,000 a month out of it. Another woman who has built up a profitable business is Mme. Chiyo, who conducts a prosperous wine and liquor business, which was established 300 years ago and came to her through her deceased husband. She is 57 years old and recently declared that she had "no use for the new woman." She is reputed to be worth \$5,000,000.

The geisha girl is to Japan what the chorus girl is to Broadway. She consoles the tired business man of the Mikado's kingdom for the cares that infest the day by her artifices, her ingenious physical appeal and skill at entertaining. The geisha, who is debauched by ancient tradition from theatrical productions (the "girls' parts" being generally personated by men), holds forth in the tea houses and resorts that in the Western world might occasionally come under the ban of the police. Yet there is a vast difference, even if subtle distinction, between the geisha and the "lights of love," whose ancient profession is still highly honored in the

Orient, though less ostentatiously than in earlier days.

Yet, innocent as is the geisha in plying her harmless occupation, her hold on the Japanese mind is giving way before the ruthless application of Western standards. In other words, reform is trying to place the geisha on its blacklist along with her less fortunate sister, whose profession is more hazardous. Still the geisha has lots of defenders against the threatened Occidental sacrilege that would deprive her beautiful country of one of its most picturesque features.

Up to date the controversy regarding her social and moral status has been confined to verbal and written demands that she be removed from the other splendors of Japanese scenery. But in these decadent days, when reform is rampant throughout the world, the tide of public sentiment is inevitably setting in against the perpetuation of her clan.

### The Geisha Is Innocent.

#### Yet Reform Is After Her

The geisha is an entertainer, pure and simple. Her chief attraction is her youth. She must also be merry, good looking (according to Japanese standards), kittenishly friendly, insipid and never mercenary, in which respect she differs radically from the Broadway chorus girl—according to experts. She must always be ready to drink with you, smoke a thimbleful of bad tobacco in a long stemmed brass bowl pipe, make fun of your Western awkwardness in wielding chopsticks and sing and dance (after a fashion) to beguile the weary hours and chase the frowns from the brow of the T. B. M. who is not ready to go home.

The singing of a geisha is something to marvel at, because it doesn't resemble music; her dancing is mere posturing that is supposed to illustrate the poetry of motion and grace. An Oriental might get a thrill out of it, but to the Western eye it is much less exciting than the hula-hula of the Hawaiian, the wriggle of the bayaderes of India, the abdominal gyrations of the Nautch girls of the Near East, and certainly lacks the acrobatic intimacies of the shimmy dancers. Still the Japanese geisha girl is an artist of no mean order. She is compelled to provide a maximum of entertainment with the minimum of talent and risk to her ancestral dignity or offense to her pronounced sense of honor. The geisha is an institution in Japan. She is licensed by the Government and is practically owned by the keepers of the geisha houses, just as much as a baseball player

in the States is owned by the big leagues.

There are probably 200,000 geishas in Japan, about one-third of the number of ladies who follow the more unconventional profession that places them without the social pale. There are a dozen or more geishas in Tokio and Yokohama who are quite as celebrated as the famous actors in the Kabuki Theatre in Tokio, where Nakamura Utaemon, at 60 years, plays the part of young women, and his son, Fukusuke, supports him in a female role; or in Osaka, where Ganjiro holds the stellar histrionic honors.

The geisha is in a class by herself. She is usually slender, is wonderfully garbed in a resplendent kimono of lilac, cherry, gold and purple, and sports a most wonderful obi. Her hair is dressed in a high coil, upheld by jade supports, ornate pins and combs, and is almost, trebly oily and redolent with attar of rose, myrrh and musk.

The geisha always looks exceptionally clean; her small, bright face has been scrubbed and lightly filmed with rice powder. Her eyebrows are meticulously curved and her lashes pomaded; her lips delicately dyed an inviting cherry—to the T. B. M. of Japan. Of course she carries a little five inch fan, which is more of an ornament than anything else.

The geisha is taught to wear a perpetual smile. That is, in fact, the first lesson she learns. She sits next to you on the floor and (if you are a foreign "jin") proceeds to make herself agreeable—through an interpreter. She laughs merrily at your stockinged feet, your cautious investigation of the food, takes a birdlike sip out of your tiny cup of sake, explains in pantomime how to tackle the various dishes, and finally to the accompaniment of the native samisen, flute and drum sings and dances for you. Then if you are a wise man you pay the bill and go away, the bill including a substantial tip for "geisha San."

The geisha is seen at her best when she has concluded her miming little dance and comes to sit on her heels at the little lacquered table at which you have eaten many dinners in one, a resplendent little figure in lilac, cherry and purple.

It does not take long to find out that she is as susceptible to the charms of the matinee idol and movie hero as the average American girl in her teens. Her descriptions of the fascinating qualities of both (through an interpreter of course) are characteristically "gushing." At a dinner at the Maple Club in Tokio one night a winsome little geisha gave me a message for Mr. Eddie Polo, a film star of whom I had never heard. When I told her

so she seemed to doubt the statement of the interpreter that I was an American.

The most celebrated geisha resorts are in Yokohama, Kobe and Osaka. There are two or three such establishments in each of these towns which are designed for the special entertainment of foreigners and which provide the best there is in Japanese architecture, rugs, tapestries, art—and girls.

The geisha is one of the most honored of Japanese institutions. In the days of the Shoguns she was a woman of education, with many accomplishments, and highly valued in an unconventional social way. Two or three geishas even found their way to the throne. It is, indeed, said that Jingo, the first woman Emperor of Japan (200 A. D.), was a geisha.

The success of some of these early stars in the geisha world attracted many of the young women of Japan to the calling from all classes of the people, and, according to Japanese standards, lowered the standards. The geisha girl to-day is recruited from all classes of the population and is not as carefully trained as were her sisters in the olden days.

### A Geisha Retires at 25.

#### After Dancing 10 or 12 Years

A census of the geishas recently taken in Osaka provides some very interesting details regarding the personnel and profession. The largest number of geisha houses at Osaka, which has a population of more than 1,200,000, is in the Soyemon-Cho. The largest segregated district in Japan is also in Osaka. In the geisha houses there are 5,200 girls, who are regularly apprenticed to or employed by the keepers of the houses. Of the geishas 56 are graduates from the girls' higher schools, 2,916 from the higher elementary schools and 2,249 were trained in the elementary primary schools only. It will thus be seen that the standard of education of the geisha is somewhat higher than is required of shop girls and stenographers.

There is no minimum age for geishas. Of the number investigated, 713 entered the profession as "maiko" (apprentice geishas) before they were 10; 1,562 under 14 and 2,198 between 14 and 18. At 25 a geisha moves out to some other profession. A few of the girls in the Osaka resorts were singers, dancers, movie actresses and waitresses.

One of the most popular girls at the Osaka geisha resort is the illegitimate daughter of a Count. Now it is a singular thing about the geisha profession that while few descend the moral scale it is

not unusual for representatives of the less honored profession to reform and become geishas. Their early training is regarded as adding to their stock of charms.

The census of the Osaka geisha brought to light very many interesting details. Some of the girls said they "wanted to wear good clothes" that they couldn't get at home, "ride in automobiles," have "good things to eat," "get a chance to marry a rich man"—which shows that feminine human nature in the Soyemon-Cho at Osaka is not radically different from human nature in the Roaring Forties of New York city.

As near as Western intelligence can make out, the geisha girl's income is flexible. Sometimes the owner of the geisha house pays her a fixed sum for entertaining the guests; by another method the geisha pays her own expenses and gives up part of her fee; by still another the keeper of the house and the geishas share expenses and profits.

Half a century ago a clever geisha earned from sixty to seventy yen a night. Competition has brought the earnings down considerably and twenty yen (\$10) is now considered a fair return for an entertainer. When a girl leaves her home and becomes a geisha she must register with the police. She is usually compelled to borrow money from the owner of the geisha house to buy her outfit. The police must be informed of that, too, and the geisha is not permitted to share in the fees until the full amount has been paid. This is to prevent her parents or guardians from sharing the proceeds of her activities.

The keeper of the geisha house practically owns the girl until she has paid off the debts contracted for her wardrobe, which must, of course, be of the finest quality.

The census of the Osaka geishas showed that the 5,000 girls employed in such establishments owed the geisha house keepers an average of 2,000 yen each, or a total of 10,000,000 yen. Between 1916 and last year 3,000 geisha girls in Osaka were married, 1,165 moved away, 317 became waitresses, 5,382 disappeared and about 50 descended the social scale.

The geishas who married were only released after their husbands-to-be had paid their debts to the geisha house keepers, who, assured of police protection, are very exacting. Once in a while a moral wave sweeps over Japan and threatens to exterminate the geisha and her more unfortunate sister. But the geisha is of ancient origin, and Nippon, jealous of its traditions, stays the profane hand of reform.